BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

THESIS

SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINE
LADY MACBETH

by

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H.E.L

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout this thesis I shall attempt to interpret Lady Macbeth as she was--both on and off the stage, and to give an understanding of her character through her own words, through the adverse and favorable criticisms of many of her interpreters, and through the opinions of some of her impersonators.

In a study of the character of Lady Macbeth, we are compelled to take full account of the rough, barbarous times in which she lived and of the man with whose fate her own was interwoven. Of the times, it is only necessary to say that it was a period of development, when great souls appeared side by side with natures still unable to subdue the savage instincts which looked tothe letting of blood as the cure of all evils. Macbeth himself is a complete type of his age. In him intellectual force is at war with the superstitutions of the age. His strong, potent reason tells him that the witches and their incantations are frauds, but his ambition prompts him to desire to accept them as veritable beings from a world of shadows, having knowledge of his future and a power to influence it. Macbeth had a profound regard for the intellectual and the moral qualities of his wife, and he is throughout more anxious to deceive her into the belief in the occult power of the three women of the night than to deceive himself.

To understand Lady Macbeth aright, one must keep in view the fact that Macbeth was a magnificent type of the great

soldier. He was a born commander. To Lady Macbeth he was a hero--the chiefest man in all the world. Her great love for him, her utter unselfishness, make her his ardent prompter. She is eager to prove her love. She becomes urgent in her desire to remove all obstacles from Macbeth's upward path. Because her love takes upon itself this complexion, the world has hurried, with unthinking eagerness, to brand her as supreme in crime. Granted, that out of her love, she sinned, then we understand and pity her. She urges the murder of Duncan, for she dreads the vacillation of Macbeth. She dreads lest her god shall prove to be but common clay, dreads lest she is sinning for an ignoble cause. But, alas, alas! she sinned for love.

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11. SHAKESPEARE'S SOURCES FOR LADY MACBETH

Shakespeare derived the plot of "Macbeth" from the Chronicles of Ralph Holinshed and from a collection of fables and traditions entitled "The History of Macbeth."*

It is curious to note that Holinshed alludes to Lady Macbeth only once. He says: "the words of the three

> wierd sisters also....greatly encouraged him hereunto, and speciallie his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she was that verie ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene."

We find that "in the eleventh century Macbeth married the Lady Gruoch, the granddaughter of King Kenneth 1V., who had been deposed in the year 1003 by Malcolm, son of Kenneth 111. This Malcolm was succeeded by his grandson, Duncan, who was murdered in the year 1039 by his cousin, Macbeth, who then ascended the throne."** The name Gruoch occurs in the culdees of a monastery situated on Loch Leven and reads: 'Macbbet filius Finlach...et Gruoch filia Bodhe, Rex at Regina Scotorum.' Her father, Bodhe, was the eldest son of Kenneth 1V and so Gruoch had a better claim to the throne than did Duncan. She was first married to Kilcomgain, the Thane of Moray. To this marriage was born a son, Lulach, who was Macbeth's successor to the throne. Lady Gruoch was married a second time--to Lord Macbeth. There may have been, as we may suppose, quarrels over the succession to the throne occur amongst the kinsmen of the two

* The New Hudson Shakespeare Pages 13 and 26
** Countess of Charlemont- New Shakespeare's Society Translations Page 412

families. We again may assume that a relationship might have existed between Kenneth lV and Duncan. "And may not one of the strange likenesses that come and go in families, have appeared between Kenneth's son and Duncan, causing Lady Macbeth to say of the latter:

"Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't."*

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* Countess of Charlmont New Shakespeare's Society Translations Page412

111. SHAKESPEARE'S TREATMENT OF THE SOURCES

There cannot be found a single word, phrase or line in "Macbeth" that openly states or even suggests that Lady Macbeth harbored a desire to wear a crown. It is true that the quotation in Holinshed does speak of her as being "verie ambitious", and, no doubt, this fact appears in every edition of Macbeth. But, regardless of the edition, it will be found not in the play itself but in the notes. This so occurs because it is not Shakespeare's work but Holinshed's. "Though Shakespeare took the ingredients of his plot from Holinshed, he handled his sources with considerable freedom...He was not writing a chronicle history. He was taking from Holinshed the materials for the action of a play, and considered himself at full liberty to alter them as he chose, to gain dramatic point. And one of the points he altered most fundamentally was the mature of the woman who drove Macbeth to the deed that made his soul sick unto death."* The selfish part of her character, that "unquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene" is kept out of sight.

I doubt very much if the word "historical" can properly be applied to the character of Lady Macbeth. Although the subject of the play was taken from history we never think of her with reference to historical associations as we do Queen Elinor, Katherine of Arragon, or Cleopatra.

"The magnificent creation of Shakespeare stands before us--independent of all aids of history. See! she is the

* A.M.Mackenzie Women in Shakespeare's Plays--Page 316

Lady Macbeth, and as such she lives, reigns, and is immortal in the world to imagination. What earthly title could add to her grandeur? What human record or attestation strengthen our impression of her reality?"*

It is a common idea to think of Lady Macbeth as a cruel woman, brandishing a couple of daggers and exciting her husband to butcher a poor old king. People forget that Lady Macbeth terrifies us in proportion as we sympathize with her. In "Macbeth" Shakespeare had made a psychological study of the evils of ambition and of pride. These traits, so typically human, are found invariably in every walk and station of life. These Shakespeare has delineated in the person of Lady Macbeth.

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*Mrs. Jameson--Characteristics of Women--Page 358

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* Mrs. Jameson--Characteristics of Women--Page 358

IV. INTRODUCTION OF LADY MACBETH INTO THE PLAY

Lady Macbeth is the last of the strong forces to be presented in the play. The scene quickly shifts from a bloody battlefield to a castle of grandeur--Inverness.

It is dusk. All is calm at Inverness. The peaceful surroundings of the castle are filled with the fragrance of flowers. A soft breeze gently stirs the tall trees that stand like awesome sentinels guarding Macbeth's home. Within, all is calm--yet, it is a tense calm. Tall, lighted tapers vie with the last light of day to cast ghostly figures about the drawing room. In the intermittent splurts of flame on the tapestry-covered walls ancient knights and fair maidens are discernible--dim relics of the past. On a long, low bench is seated the Lady of Inverness--the Lady Macbeth. She is reading a letter - one which she has been expectantly awaiting from her husband to bring her news of his success in battle. "With hardly concealed excitement he writes to her:

"They met me in the day of success,"

At a time when his star was in the ascendency; and with eager hopes he add:"*

And I have learned by the perfect'st report,

they have more in them than mortal knowledge."

"I have learned"-- Macbeth has evidently given the Wierd Sisters weight enough to inquire about them, so impressed is he by what they have told him. We will notice that Macbeth makes no reference to the crime which he is formulating in his

* J.Q.Adams Macbeth Page 147

mind. But Lady Macbeth can read between the lines; she can "readily divine his hidden thoughts."* Macbeth tells her of the weird sister's salutation: "Hail, king that shalt be," because she has always entered into his plans.

"This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart and farewell."

"It is evident from the letter that the two are a unit, not merely in love and general sympathy, but that Macbeth's wife is of such a nature and bears such a relationship to him that she is in his confidence in hidden aims and practical affairs in a way, for example, that Hotspur's wife* is not."** His whole communication with Lady Macbeth leads us to infer long-cherished projects of ambition, for his soaring aims lodge deeper in his wife's bosom than ever in his own.

Lady Macbeth folds the letter. She rejoices fiercely and surely, but not in the hope of future queenship. She exclaims:

> Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
> What thou art promised."

To Lady Macbeth the promise of what is to be becomes a firm resolution. "It is particularly observable, that, in Lady Macbeth's concentrated, strong-nerved ambition, the ruling passion of her mind, there is yet a touch of womanhood; she is ambitious less for herself than for her husband. It is fair to think this, because we have no reason to draw any other infer-

* Henry IV Pt. 1. Act II Sc.iii ll. 106-115
** Furness Variorum Ed. II. Page 70

ence either from her words or actions. In this famous soliloquy, after reading her husband's letter, Lady Macbeth does not once refer to herself. It is of him she thinks: she wishes to see her husband on the throne, and to place the sceptre within his grasp. The strength of her affection adds strength to ambition."*

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be what thou art promised!" Mrs. Siddons, one of the foremost interpreters of Lady Macbeth, uttered this in an exalted prophetic tone, as if the whole future were present in her soul.

Lady Macbeth continues:

"Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way."

We infer from these lines that Lady Macbeth has a very fine opinion of her husband. "There is no indication of female scorn: there is exceeding pride, but no egotism in the sentiment or the expression; no want of wifely and womanly respect and love for him."** She fears that obstacles will arise to hinder Macbeth from accomplishing the deed, and one of these hindrances is his own nature. She fears that he is too kind, but in this she is mistaken. It is not kindness that holds him back from the crime but cowardice. This passage is generally taken to be complimentary to him, but it is doubtful whether Lady Macbeth thought it so - not because she was evil minded, but because she was decidedly keen minded. She prides herself on understanding clearly and without confusion the practical

* Mrs. Jameson--Characteristics of Women--Page 368
** Ibid

necessities of success, as the easy-going, general run of human beings do not.

"Thou would'st be great," says Lady Macbeth, "Art not without ambition; but without the illness should attend it."

"One sees that 'ambition' and 'great' and 'highly' and even 'illness' are to her simply terms of praise, and 'holily' and 'human kindness' simply terms of blame. Moral distinctions do not in this exaltation exist for her; or rather they are inverted: 'good' means to her the crown and whatever is required to obtain it; 'evil,' whatever stands in the way of its attainment. This attitude of mind is evident more when she is alone, though it becomes still more pronounced when she has to work upon her husband. And it persists until her end is attained. But, without being exactly forced, it betrays a strain which could not long endure."*

"What thou would'st highly,
That would'st thou holily; would'st not play false,
And yet would'st wrongly win; thoud'st have great Glamis,
That which cries, 'Thus thou must do, if thou have it.
And that which rather does fear to do
Than wishest should be undone."

(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 18-23)

The above passage has presented great difficulty to all readers and interpreters of Macbeth, and much effort has

* A. C. Bradley Shakesperian Tragedy Page 369

been exercised upon it to extract its meaning. Intellectually considered, Macbeth is powerful in all things, but has strength in none. Morally, he is selfish, that is, as far as his weakness will permit him to be. Could he have everything he wanted he would rather have it innocently--"ignorant, as alas! how many are, that he who wishes a temporal end for itself does in truth will themeans."*

Samuel Johnson thinks that since the object of Macbeth's desire is introduced here speaking of itself the passage should read, "Thus thou must do, if thou have me."**

I believe that Lady Macbeth's reflections are consistently developed. The whole thread and connection of her analysis of Macbeth stands out clear and marked to its climax, and it presents itself thus:

"Thou wouldst be great;
Thou wouldst have (the crown);
Then thus thou must do.

Lady Macbeth resolves to supply from her own being what Macbeth lacks in his:

"Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear,
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal."

(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 23-28)

* Furness Variorum Ed. ll. Page 73
** Samuel Johnson Shakespeare Vol Vl. Page 392

She knows his instability of purpose, and knows that her presence is necessary to goad him on to the consummation of his promised greatness. Notice how Lady Macbeth does not, even for an instant, seek for any spiritual aid, but she takes sufficient practical steps toward it herself through her own will power.

Suddenly a messenger rushes into the room with the news, "The King comes here tonight."

(Act 1 Sc. v l. 29)

Lady Macbeth is completely surprised. She had been pondering over the necessary deed, and, no doubt, an opportune time to accomplish it. Startled at this unexpected announcement she exclaims: "Thou'rt mad to say it!"

"Here is a stroke of nature. Lady Macbeth had been meditating on what she considered the nearest way to the honor which was offered to them, and, when she hears the King was about to put himself in her power, she speaks in reference to ideas which had passed through her own mind. It then occurs to her that she might have disclosed too much, and she seeks to direct the mind of the attendant from any too strict scrutiny of the meaning of what she had uttered:

"Is not thy master with him? Who, were't so
Would have inform'd for preparation"

She explains it as having no other meaning than as referring to the want of sufficient notice to make preparation for the reception of so illustrious a guest."*

The Messenger further informs Lady Macbeth that "our

* Bell Variorum Page 76

Thane is coming"--one of his fellow men brought the message so speedily that he was "almost dead for breath."

> "Give him tending," she says, "he brings great news."
>
> (Act 1 Sc. v ll. 35-36)

--That is, treat him as the bringer of good news deserves. Does this not show how kind Lady Macbeth must have been--to have such consideration and regard for a mere servant? Hard though she is, she is not lacking in affection, though she seems to belong to that class of people whose capacity for feeling does not extend beyond their own family.

Her tone of voice changes--her whole being is altered. She says:

> "The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> Under my battlements."
>
> (Act 1 Sc. v ll 36-38)

Notice that the word "my" is purposely used by Shakespeare to let us into the spirit of the character intended for the wife of the Thane; the castle is <u>hers</u>--not Macbeth's, and not theirs together. Hunter seems to think this sentence "prepares for that overbearing of the milder and gentler spirit of the Thane which follows."*

I have not found any critic who directly disagrees with Mr. Hunter's interpretation. For myself, I am inclined to think it does display a domineering quality in Lady Macbeth.

* Hunter Variorum Page 77

She is transported with the thoughts of the future and has decided that she herself must act--to do the deed herself. She knows that without her Macbeth will fail to grasp this opportunity of greatness. Yet, in this exaltant mood, she realizes the deed will be a trying one for her. She appeals to supernatural powers to aid her--to stifle in her all feelings of pity or of remorse:

> "Come, you spirits
> That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
> And fill me, from the crown to the toe top-full
> Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;
> Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
> That no compunctious visitings of nature
> Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
> The effect and it!"
>
> (Act 1 Sc. v ll. 38-45)

What a dreadful picture is this of Lady Macbeth! She is keyed up to the highest pitch. "The shock of the thing which is so near, and the imminent need of strength for Macbeth's sake, has roused her to trample her own shrinking in a fury of self-abrogating exaltation. She <u>knows</u> she is doing violence to her whole nature, and is willing to do so as the price of his success, till she comes to identify herself with him in the actual performance of the deed."*

Does not this soliloquy paint a true picture of Lady Macbeth? It reveals her inner, natural self. People who are

* A. M. Mackenzie Women in Shakespeare's Plays Page 321

naturally and wholeheartedly cruel do not have to spur themselves on to deeds of cruelty. When we exhort ourselves to be brave, it is because we know we are liable to fear. Lady Macbeth is accessible to feelings of pity and remorse. She knows it, and she is afraid of being overwhelmed by them. By an effort of will she represses, but cannot eliminate them, and they take their revenge in her subconscious self.

Morally, therefore, Lady Macbeth is not quitethe inhuman monster which she makes hereself out to be. What else does she unconsciously reveal about herself?

Within narrow limits she is clear-sighted, practical, and efficient. But the limits are very narrow. The most fatal defect in her intellectual make-up, the cause of her incapacity to achieve great things, is her complete lack of imagination. She sees the surface of life only; of the hidden forces that underline it she has no idea. "Her wisdom does not exceed the wisdom of the proverbs. "Where there is a will there is a way," she thinks; and for her the way seems an easy way. The seizure of the crown is the simplest of problems, when "time and place" have put the reigning king within your power."*

Coleridge, one of Lady Macbeth's most famous critics, speaks of this passage as displaying "all the false efforts of a mind accustomed only to the shadows of the imagination, vivid enough to throw the every-day realities into shadows, but not yet compared with their own correspondent realities."**

In her furious thirst for power, Lady Macbeth feels

* G.F.Brodby Short Studies in Shakespear Page 121
** Coleridge Shakesperian Criticism Page 72

that her woman's heart is unequal to the calls of her ambition and so she utters:

"Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, Hold, Hold!

(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 45-52)

She is going to wield the knife, not urge her husband to do what she knows he fears. She calls on night to furnish a thick, foul, smoky blanket to cover the evil doings of that night.

"There appears a double suggestion or intent in these lines--one meaning following the thought of security, that even heaven will not know the evil doer so blanketed; and the other, that the obsuring shadow of images, or of crime--The dunnest smoke of hell--shall so crowd her mind and inspire her acts that no glimpse of heaven--conscience--may shine through to call upon the criminal to hold her hand. Both of these meanings are so naturally suggested by the train of thought and images that fill her brain that they mingle and find expression in the same words, although they are in their natures, separate and distinct. Her resolution thus supported by spirits of ill--

grim imaginings--she pushes her husband, willing and unwilling, into the crime which brings a terrible retribution to both."*

I agree with Agnes Mackenzie's interpretation: "Those are not the words of a woman defying heaven: they are a woman defying her own fear of heaven. That to her is a hindrance to the end she wills. And at the crown of the wild mood of furious exaltation and sheer self-surrender, there enters a man who is its cause, and she greets him in a passion of homage."**

"Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!"
(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 53-54)

Lady Macbeth does not seem to display any womanly joy at the home-coming of her husband. Many seem to think she should have rushed into her husband's arms--wept for joy upon his shoulder--and carried on as though she really was glad to see him. For, after all, had he not been through a terrible battle?

"Lady Macbeth was not one of the turtle doves...She received her mate fittingly--with murder in her soul."*** Mrs. Jameson thinks "This is surely the very rapture of ambition! And those who have heard Mrs. Siddons pronounce the word "hereafter" cannot forget the look, the tone, which seemed to give her auditors a glimpse of that awful "future" which she, in her prophetic fury, beholds upon the instant."****

Macbeth evidently has great affection for his wife. He greets her with, "My dearest Love,

* Furness Variorum Ed. 11 Page 82
**A.M.Mackenzie Women in Shakespeare's Plays Page 321
*** Mrs. Jameson - Characteristics of Women-Page 452
**** Ibid

Duncan comes here tonight."

(Act 1 Sc. v l. 56)

"And when goes hence?" casually.

"Tomorrow," he answers, and pauses, and adds, "as he purposes."

In the look and in the pause Lady Macbeth has read his whole soul and purpose. There is murder in that look, and she cries:

"Your face, my Thane, is as a book,
Where men may read strange matters."

(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 60-61)

"There is no explanation between them. He has conveyed all his intentions by a look and a gesture, as she distinctly says...There is no warrant of any kind that, in the simple words "And when goes hence?" she means more than she had said. It was the most natural question that she could possibly ask. Granting that she intended equally with him to commit the murder, what is more natural than that she should wish to know how soon it was necessary to carry out the plan of murder, and what time there was to make all the arrangements?"*

She bids him:

"Look like the time; bear welcome in your eyes,
Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't."

(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 62-64)

* W.W.Story Variorum Ed. ll Page 84

We can imagine that Lady Macbeth uttered these lines very slowly, severely, and impressive. She takes charge of matters and lets him know he can rely upon her:

"He that's coming
Must be provided for; and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch,
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom."

(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 64-68)

"This is exactly what her husband has been looking for; she has now taken the actual effort and immediate responsibility of the deed upon herself. Nevertheless, the selfishly covetous and murderous coward still affects to hesitate"* He is still troubled, finding it, as she had done, more than he can face, and so he murmurs:

"We will speak further."

(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 69-71)

But Lady Macbeth does not care to discuss it--it is all planned in her mind. She again repeats her warning;

"Only look up clear;
To alter favour even is to fear.
Leave all the rest to me."

(Act 1 Sc. v ll. 69-71)

Lady Macbeth is shaming her husband by her own daring. She is not too cowardly to be afraid to assume the responsability. She is instigating her husband's heart to the pur-

* G.F. Fletcher Studies in Shakespeare Page 184

pose-- exciting his courage to the execution.

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With ease does Lady Macbeth greet King Duncan. She accepts his greeting of "Honour'd hostess" most graciously, and most graciously returns it. Yet, she is quite humble in her welcome.

"All our service
In every point twice done and then done double
Were poor and single business to contend
Against those honors deep and broad wherewith
Your majesty loads our house: for those of old,
And the late dignities heap'd up to them,
We rest your hermits."

(Act 1 Sc. vi ll. 14-16)

Samuel Coleridge thinks the very rhythm of this speech expresses insincere overmuch in Lady Macbeth's welcome.* I so not favor this interpretation, because it expresses a trait in Lady Macbeth's character which she did not possess-- that of insincerity. Whatever faults Lady Macbeth did have there was one she was not guilty of, and that was hypocrisy. "I am inclined to believe that, could she have seen that her own life might be wrecked in this venture, and Macbeth still secure all that his ambition craved, her dauntless spirit would have urged her on, in spite of everything, and her smile would have been as sweet, her tone as solicitous, and her

* Coleridge Shakesperian Criticism Page 74

white hand would have neither faltered nor trembled in the grasp of her sovereign victim."*

* * * * * * * * * *

Macbeth declares to himself that he wishes the whole affair were over. The horror of the thing rises before him. He cannot face it. He realizes he is weakening from the deed he had resolved on. The thought of failure frightens him. Lady Macbeth enters. He turns, startled:

"How now! what news?"

(Act 1 Sc. vii l. 28)

Hurriedly and softly she whispers:

"He has almost supp'd."

(Act 1 Sc. vii l. 29)

Macbeth falls back to his counter-resolve:

"We will proceed no further in this business."

(Act 1 Sc. vii l. 31)

This is like a bomb-shell thrown at her feet. Lady Macbeth's hopes for him are given a sudden blow. She becomes disappointed, depressed. Resentment and contempt fill her. She stares at him. "Her strained nerves give, for the fierce exaltation of her earlier mood is past now, and she has been playing the smiling hostess. She is torn with anxiety that Macbeth will betray them and that her womanly strength will be inadequate. She turns on him now, with a flurry of fiery phrases, almost hysterically angry at his resolution",**

* M. Leigh-Noel Lady Macbeth Page 16
** Mrs. Jameson Characteristics of Women Page 446

"Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself?
Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love."

(Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 35-39)

We can see from the above quotation that Lady Macbeth is up raiding her husband for his lack of courage. See how she pronounces that word "such"-- with a snap of her fingers--to show him what a coward he is in her eyes--and what he should be in his own. "You do not love me," she challenges him. What bitter words are these to fling at Macbeth. Lady Macbeth knows they are all-powerful and can wound her husband very deeply. She does not hesitate to tell Macbeth that henceforth she will consider his courage "green" and "pale," and goes on taunting him:

"Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire? Woulds't thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would"
Like a poor cat i' the adage?"

Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 39-44)

Would he be such a coward as to allow a few paltery

fears rule his mind? "The eloquence--the fierce, fervid eloquence with which she bears down the relenting and reluctant spirit of her husband...the sarcastic manner in which she lets fall the word coward--a word which no man can endure from another, still less from a woman, and least of all from the woman he loves, and the bold address with which she removes all scruples, and marshals the way before him, absolutely makes us shrink before the commanding intellect of the woman, with a terror in which interest and admiration are strongly mixed."* Lady Macbeth wields her weapon, "You are too cowardly," in such a clever manner that it is bound to inflict a mortal wound in the soul of Macbeth.

Macbeth defends himself sulkily:

"I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none."

(Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 46-47)

For the first time Macbeth has asserted himself--he has raised a moral issue. Seizing upon this opportunity Lady Macbeth cries:

"What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?"

(Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 47-49)

Lady Macbeth hurls these words as sharply as she can, and with vehemence and fury. "You said you would," she reminds him. "Are you going to break that promise now? Are you a man of such weak honor and character that you now are afraid

* Mrs. Jameson Characteristics of Women Page 446

to uphold it?"

We shall see throughout the play how Lady Macbeth continually reminds her husband that he said he would murder Duncan. She holds this promise like the sword of Damocles over his head.

The word "beast" quoted in the above passage is used merely as a contrast to the word "man." Lady Macbeth reproaches her husband with the statement that if he were man enough to make such a promise, why is he not man enough to keep it? She accuses him of not loving her; if he did love her nothing could prevent him from carrying out his plan.

According to Bradley, in the above quotation, and in the following lines:

> "When you durst do it, then you were a man;
> And to be more than what you were, you would
> Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
> Did then adhere, and yet you would make both;
> They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
> Does unmake you."
>
> (Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 49-54)

Lady Macbeth asserts (1) that Macbeth proposed the murder to her; (2) that he did so at a time when there was no opportunity to attack Duncan, no "adherence" of "time" and "place"; and, (3) that he declared he would make an opportunity, and swore to carry out the murder."*

Quite a different tone is found in the following

* A.C. Bradley Shakesperian Tragedy Page 481

interpretation of Lady Macbeth through these lines. To Macbeth "Lady Macbeth lies; he had proposed nothing; it was she; his letter it was that had first planted in her the thought of crime, and she might think, or say, that she had done no more than follow."*

Does this passage show a moral wickedness in Lady Macbeth? Is there evidence here of a good man gone wrong under the influence of such a wife? I think the answer to these questions should be an emphatic, no! It is a clear case of Macbeth's hypocrisy--he was leading his wife on to a moral downfall.

Yet, see Lady Macbeth shame her husband by contrasting her womanly nature and his supposedly strong nature. Mark the turning back upon herself the spoken memory of nobler days:

"I have given suck, and know
How tender 't is to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked the nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this."

(Act 1 Sc. vii ll 54-59)

It is with a strength and force of character unnatural to her that Lady Macbeth exclains that rather than be the thing Macbeth affects to be and break her sworn word, she would do thus. "How well portrayed are the complexities

* Darmesteter Variorum Ed. 11. Page 107

of human nature! This woman, prepared to do murder, halts at the treshold of a broken oath."*

A great stress is sometimes laid upon this passage, as presenting a redeeming trait in Lady Macbeth's character. "But we have only her own assertion; and granting it to be true, what value do we attach to Lady Macbeth's notion off tenderness? Is it the tenderness of which a human and gentle and truly femine mother is susceptible? May we not assume, too, that she colors the circumstance with the view of shaming her husband into guilty resolution, by telling how in defiance to nature's most holy law, she would have cleaved to her oath? I think we may infer, from the nature of her boast, the tenderness of her maternal feelings. I form my idea of Lady Macbeth's character, not from what she says, but from what she does."**

Shakespeare evidently meant that the treat should come from a nature not habitually cruel, but capable of cruelty only through force of a vow. This is the ideal heroine. The other delineation shows no sacrifice of feeling.

Macbeth feels the fury of Lady Macbeth's will--more than her words. Already she has moved him, and his question is partly an attempt to justify himself by showing her the deed has practical dufficulties, and partly an appeal to her to shatter his remaining doubts: "If we should fail?" he says diffidently, and the answered with a fierce,

"We fail!"

(Act 1 Sc. vii l. 59)

* William Greer Harrison Women of Shakespeare Page 23
** Knowles Variorum Ed. 11. Page 108

How does Lady Macbeth mean "we fail"? As "We fail."- the calm deduction of a mind which, having weighed all circumstances,is prepared, without loss of confidence in itself, for the worst that can happen? Or is it a "We fail!"--a hasty interruption of scornful impatience. Mrs. Siddons "uttered this with fury, not surprise, with falling inflection, bowing, with her hands down, the palms upward."* Miss Ellen Terry gives a cry of defiance as she resolutely responds, "we fail!" and then laughingly urges Macbeth to courage and promises him success."*

I prefer Mrs. Siddons interpretation. It seems consistent with the dark fatalism of Lady Macbeth's character. It expresses a moral firmness in her which makes her quite prepared to endure failure and its consequences. It is a decided rebuke conveyed to her husband for lack of moral strength on his part at the possibility of defeat. She finds it necessary to banish this fear from his mind:

"But screw your courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail."

(Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 60-61)

Up to this point the actual murder of Duncan has not been planned in detail, but it is now suggested to the vacillating mind of Lady Macbeth. She has become coldly practical:

"When Duncan is asleep--

* * * *

his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,

* Bell - Variorum Ed. ll. Page 110

That memory, the wonder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only; when in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie as in a death
What cannot you and I perform upon
Th' unguarded Duncan? What not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?"

(Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 72-74)

In intense admiration of his wife's ingenuity as contrasted with his own want of masculine self-possession, he exclaims:

"Bring forth men-children only:
For thy undaunted mettle shall compose
Nothing but males."

(Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 79-82)

Her lofty determination of character makes a deep impression on Macbeth's mind. He feels that she has played a better part than even he, a soldier, could play. He is proud of her, and no better compliment could he pay her than that. Her courage has won him, and he takes the decisive step:

"I am settled.
False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

(Act 1 Sc. vii ll. 79-82)

It is the dead of night. "The gracious Duncan, shut up in the measureless content of sleep, reposes sweetly...The

daring fiend, whose pernicious potions have stupefied the attendants, and who even "laid their daggers ready,"--her own spirit, exalted by the thoughts of power for him, now enters the gallery in eager expectation of the results of her terrible diligence.

We find Lady Macbeth shrinking at the last moment from the act which she had certainly sworn to herself to perform. "Had he not resembled my father as he slep't,

I had done't."

(Act 11 Sc. ii 11.12-13)

In this moment of extremest horror comes an unexpected touch of feeling, so startling, yet so wonderfully true to Lady Macbeth's nature. "Thus, in one of Weber's or Beethoven's grand symphonies, some unexpected--soft minor chord or passage will steal on the ear, heard amid the magnificient crash of harmony, making the blood pause, and filling the eye with unbidden tears."*

This little touch of nature in Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most pregnant hints of character, and of itself should be enough to upset the more common notion of Lady Macbeth. "It tells us that, notwithstanding the appalling invocation she made to the 'murdering ministers,' her milk continues to be milk. And what a suggestive contrast it makes to the terrible audacity of thought and speech she just displayed! It is the tenderness of her woman's heart that causes her to see in the sleeping king an image of her father."**

* Mrs. Jameson Characteristics of Women Page 369
** New Hudson Shakespeare Page 48

The sole performance of the murder still devolves upon the wicked but irresolute hand of the original assessin, Macbeth himself. He tells her flatly:

"I have done the deed."

(Act 11 Sc. ii l. 14)

When Macbeth returns after the murder of Duncan, his character stands completely revealed. Until then he was unknown to his wife. Her fears of his nature being "too full o' the milk of human kindness" were groundless--his nature presents itself in a guise that is beyond her knowledge.

He is afraid. Already the deed is preying on Macbeth's mind, and he commences to rave. Lady Macbeth bids him think no more about the deed as it will only tend to drive them both mad. She tries to bring him back to his senses by settling his mind on practical and concrete details:

"Go, get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand."

Lady Macbeth bids Macbeth not to be so cowardly and afraid when a little water will remove all evidence. Does she indeed feel thus? Is this the real emotion of her mind? Does she think that a little water will wash out what has been done, and that it is as easy to assume all traces of it will vanish from her heart and soul as from her hand? In the loneliness of midnight, in the privacy and secrecy of her chamber she shall answer this from her sleep.

Macbeth discovers he is still holding the daggers he

had in his fear forgotten to put down. He balks at touching them further. Her nerves frayed, Lady Macbeth angrily snatches them:

"Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers; the sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures; 't is the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal;
For it must seem their guilt."

(Act 11 Sc. ii 11. 52-57)

Here is a point, that strikingly illustrates Lady Macbeth's character. "She, having real remorse, does recoil at the last moment from the very act to which she had been using such violent and continued efforts to work herself up; but, being totally free from her husband's irritability of fancy, can, now, that his very preservation demands it, go deliberately to look upon the sanguinary work which her own hand had shrunk from performing."*

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* Fletcher Studies in Shakespeare Page 127

V THE SWOON OF LADY MACBETH

A terrible knowking is ahead at the gate. Lady Macbeth realizes in what peril she and her husband are situated, and acts to avoid discovery:

"Retire to our chamber."

(Act 11 Sc. ii l. 65)

Below, Macduff rouses the household with shouting, and, over the disturbance comes the frenzied clangor of the alarm bell. Lady Macbeth rushes from her room to see what has disturbed "the sleepers of the house." When informed of the dreadful situation her exclamation is

"What, in our house?"

(Act 11 Sc. iii l. 73)

Here Lady Macbeth almost betrays herself; she perceives that she has blundered. "She hears, as in a dream, the sententious and lachrymose expletives of her husband. Can he stand there and prate on what, so short a time ago, he was afraid to look on? What had made him so ready to strike at the hapless grooms when, but a moment before, he seems to melt with fear at the sight of blood upon his hands? Now, while she intensely watches him, she totters and all objects wildly career before her eyes. He is grandiloquently expatiating on the deed itself. He had passed beyond her tutelage, and had imbibed the spirit of the time."*

She knows he is over-acting his part, and tries to draw the other men's attention from him. Feebly she cries:

* Warburton Variorum Ed. 11. Page 157

"Help me hence, ho!"

May it be that the description of Duncan as he lay in death has been too much for Lady Macbeth--that she tries to run away from the image and her limbs fail--her strength goes, the lights dim, and she swoons?

The prevalent notion concerning this question is that Lady Macbeth's swooning is feigned. Macbeth, by his unconcern, betrays a consciousness that the fainting is feigned.* Another interpretation is that "Lady Macbeth's amiable powers give way, and the swoon is real."**

To me, Lady Macbeth's attempt at fainting can most highly be regarded as a success. In her exclamation one may discern an urgent wish to escape from an awkward situation rather than a genuine cry of alarm rising from fear of collapsing. She had reason to fear for her personal safety and that of her husband, and the exceptionally severe events to which she had listened were sufficient causes for her to faint.

Lady Macbeth was clever enough to see that something had to be done in this very embarrassing situation--she must draw the attention of the group away from her husband; and employing the well-known device of women, she cried for aid.

Ordinarily, a person who is about to faint is unable to ask for help, and just falls down. To further emphasize this fact I am going to give a few examples of real, true fainting. In different parts Shakespeare has shown his usual great talent in distinguishing between one character and an-

* Furness Variorum Ed. 11 Page 158
** F. Horn Variorum Ed. 11 Page 158

other, in respect of the manner in which women conduct themselves during fainting scenes. Compare Rosalind, Hero, and Hermione with Lady Macbeth and observe that they differ, from their very natures and situations.

When Oliver shows Rosalind the handkerchief stained with the blood of her beloved, the blood of Rosalind runs curdling from her brain to her heart, and she swoons away,--falls like one dead, to be caught by the wondering Oliver. Few words are spoken, because few are needed; but this swoon is not brief incident; and Rosalind recovers, only to be led off by the aid of Celia and Oliver. Here Rosalind makes an attempt to assert her feigned manhood. She insists that she counterfeited, and repeats her assertion.

"That it is his blood, Orlando's very blood makes Rosalind faint."* "The strain upon her feelings is too much even for her powers of self-command, gret as they are, and she falls fainting into her cousin's arms. Oliver ascribes her fainting to the not uncommon experience, that "Many will swoon when they do look upon blood."**

Lady Macbeth had just listened to the gory details of Duncan's murder. May she not have taken advantage of the fact that women will swoon at the mention of blood, and employed such a means of escape?

In the "Winter's Tale" Hermione is accused of unfaithfulness. At the very moment that she is acquitted, she

* Furness Variorum E. 11. Page 247
** Helena Faucit Shakespeare's Female Characters. Page 280

learns the death of the prince, her son, who,

"Conceiving the dishonor of his mother,
Had straight declined, droop'd took it deeply,
Fasten'd and dix'd the shame on't in himself,
Threw off his spirit, appetite, and sleep,
And downright languished."

She swoons away with grief. Lucius Sherman, professor of English Literature in the University of Nebraska calls this"a dead swoon."*

Let us take a glance at Much Ado About Nothing." Standing before the altar about to be wed were Claudio and Hero. Claudio, influenced by malicious lies, openly rejects Hero. "She is at first so stunned, so bewildered, so unable to realize what is meant by the accusations she is unable to speak. Her father, unable to bear the dishonor which is now on their family, cries:

"Hath no man's dagger here a point for me?"
(Act IV Sc. i. l. 103)

At these words Hero swoons at her father's feet."** The manner in which Hero took the accusations brought against her and against her father was beautiful--suited to a young and innocent girl.

"Her caving in under the unjust accusations is like Ophelia's silence in her interviews with Hamlet, to be compared with Lesdemona's ill-starred speeches that brought about her death, and the pathetic appeal of Imogen that she was true,

* L.A.Sherman What is Shakespeare? Page 133
** Furness Variorum Ed. 11. Page 200

and the notable indignation of Hermione against the accusers."*

Hero fainted because of the dishonor that had come upon her family. May not Lady Macbeth, to escape bringing shame to Macbeth and herself, have employed it as such a stratagem?

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V1 LADY MACBETH IN THE BANQUET SCENE

The ambition of Lady Macbeth's life is realized--her Thane is mighty--he is powerful--he is King. But, she lacks the joy, and satisfaction that should attain such an honor. Within the palace she is nervously pacing up and down. A sudden premonition of something dreadful seems to hang over her. She is oppressed by the weight of conscious guilt. She sends her servant to summon Macbeth, and, alone, she soliloquizes:

"Naught's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content;
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy."

This outburst of Lady Macbeth's is a remarkable and remorseful acknowledgement of a mistaken life. "Here is truly the groaning of a mind diseased--the corroding of a rooted sorrow."*

Her very next words, addressed to her royal husband:

"Why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making;
Using those thoughts that should indeed have died
With them they think on? Things without all rededy
Should be without regard: what's done is done."
(Act 111 Sc. ii 11. 8-12)

still speak the language of a heart held fast within the clutches of an incurable guilt. Later these very words: "What's done,

* Fletcher Studies in Shakespeare Page 131

is done" are to be repeated by her when she walks in her sleep. Mrs. Siddons thinks this is one of the passages in which Lady Macbeth's intense love of her husband is shown in every word. It is not contemptuous reproach, but deep sorrow and sympathy with his melancholy.

Lady Macbeth bids her husband:

"Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks,
Be bright and jovial among your guests to-
night."

(Act 111 Sc. ii l. 45)

But he does not take her into his confidence and tell her of his plans. Instead:

"Be innocent of the knowledge, my Chuck."

)Act 111 Sc. ii l. 49)

"Of all the deeply tragic passages of this drama, this is the deepest. Unintentionally and unconsciously there here breathes from Macbeth's soul an echo of that happier time when the mutual esteem of a heroic pair was accompanied by the delicate attentions of first love"*

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Surrounded by their Court, in all the apparent ease and self-complacency of which their souls are destitute, Lord and Lady Macbeth are together at the Royal Banquet. Seated on the throne Lady Macbeth is gracious and charming to the guests. Macbeth even mingles with them. Soon Lady Macbeth notices her

* R.H.Hieke Variorum Ed. 11. Page 197

husband's withdrawal and calls him back with a courteous reproach:

"My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer; the feast is sold
That is not often vouched."

(Act lll Sc. iv ll.32-34)

Suddenly!--Banquo's ghost enters. The sheer shock in the moment of rejoicing breaks Macbeth's nerve till that hardened soldier is blind to anything but fear. Lady Macbeth cannot see the ghost--but--she can see her husband. It is up to her again to supply his ever-failing nerve with new courage, while all the time her own mind is agonized by the complicated pangs of terror and remorse. She quiets the guests and bids them "sit" and explains:

"If you much note him
You shall offend him, and extend his passion.
Feed, and regard him not."

(Act lll Sc. iv ll. 56-58)

Then, grasping her husband by the arm she tries to arouse him to self-control by a low-voiced taunt:

"Are you a man?"

(Act lll Sc. iv l. 58)

There is a smothered terror, yet a domineering indignation in her question. Again Lady Macbeth pierces his very heart with sarcasm and scorn. She upbraids him for his lack of courage that he should be possessed of such base fear.

Mrs. Sibbons gives an excellent description of the way in which she acted the part here: "Lying with fear, yet assuming the utmost composure, Lady Macbeth returns to her stately canopy, and with trembling nerves, having tottered up the steps to her throne, that bad eminence, she entertains her wondering guests with frightful smiles, with over-acted attention, and with fitful graciousness; painfully, yet, incessantly, laboring to devert their attention from her husband. Whilst writing thus under her internal agonies, her restless and terrifying glances towards Macbeth, in spite of all her efforts to suppress them, have thrown the whold table into amazement."*

As a last desperate effort, Lady Macbeth makes an appeal to the courtesy owed by Macbeth as host, to his friends:

"My worthy lord,
Your noble friends do lack you."
(Act 111 Sc iv 11. 83-84)

This admonishment brings Macbeth back to his senses. He apologizes to his guests and orders more wine served. Unable to resist the temptation to offer a toast to Banquo, he does so in sheer daring. But what a foolish piece of bravado that was! It only was an invitation for the ghost to appear again. Macbeth goes to pieces under the gaze of its "Sightless eyes."

Again, brave Lady Macbeth tries gallantly to save him:

"Think of this, good peers,
But as a thing of custom."

J.Q.Adams Macbeth Page 197

Macbeth, in his fear and terror, almost makes a confession of the crimes to the guests. Again, it is his wife who rushes to his side, to save him from self-ruination. Her voice almost shocked with anxiety and fear pleads:

"Speak not; he grows worse and worse.
Question enrages him. At once, good night.
Stand not upon the order of your going
But go at once."

(Act 111 Sc. iv 11. 116-119)

In hurried confusion the guests leave the room--fully aware that something is amiss.

The Lady Macbeth of four days ago is no more. Her spirit is broken. She murmurs feebly:

"You lack the season of all natures, sleep!"

(Act 111 Sc. iv 1. 141)

Behold the once-defiant and indomitable Queen reduced to a frail, broken, weak creature! Her strong will, "at first untrammeled by any considerations or consequences, by any of her husband's "horrible imaginnings," gives place to remorse, capabilities of which it becomes evident, she possessed in a high degree."*

"We begin to think of her now less as the awful copartner of murder than as a woman with much that is grand in her, and much that it piteous. Strange and ludricrous as the statement may sound, (for it is not new) she is, up to her light, a perfect wife. She gives her husband the best she has;

* Carson Variorum Ed. 11 Page 231

and the fact that she never uses to him the terms of affection, which, up to this point of the play, he employs to her is certainly no indication of want of love."*

This is the last we see of Lady Macbeth and her husband together. They continue to drift apart because she can no longer help him. One thing worth noticing is that they never quarrel--never a word of reproach for one another. "However fallen they are, nevertheless, great, and they keep for each other the high courtesy of their greatness."**

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* A.C.Bradley Shakesperian Tragedy Page 376
** A.M.Mackenzie Women in Shakespeare's Plays Page 340

V11 THE SLEEPWALKING OF LADY MACBETH

We have one more sight of Lady Macbeth, and that is all, and adequately. For at her last appearance she is wandering in the loneliness of sleep, and that splendid will of hers is in abeyance, so that we can see what she has held in check. In the third act we had a glimpse of her in the hell of futile irremediable weariness that is the very core of tragedy, harder to bear than any poignance of more immediate pain. Now in her dreams we can see hell peopled with the demons of her memories. They are less elaborate than her husband's, for she has not his imagination to weave horrors like embroidery, but there is always one thing in her mind: an old man, like her father, lying bloody, and his blood on her hands in the darkness, warm and sticky and foul-smelling, clinging so that she cannot get it off. The smell of this innocent blood incessantly haunts her.

See how "her essential frailty is made manifest to us and we are left with the impression, not of a fiend-woman, but of a woman in whom will conquered certain softer parts in her nature, a nature, however, which was to reassert itself when the will had been broken and shattered by too great a strain and exhaustion."*

The ordeal of the banquet scene is the last straw; we never see Lady Macbeth herself again. Her already enfeebled mind has given way at last, and she becomes as mad as her husband--in fact, madder.

Let us imagine ourselves at the hour of midnight in

* Allardyce Nicoll Studies in Shakespeare Page 134

the dimly-lighted chamber of Lady Macbeth. The subdued whispering of the Gentlewoman imparts a feeling of horror. She is telling the Doctor that she has seen Lady Macbeth "rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth a paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep."

(Act V Sc. i ll. 4-7)

This rather wonderful picture of Lady Macbeth's subconscious actions show with perfect clarity the direct cause of her insanity. Having been for so long a time the controlling genius of Macbeth's destiny, she is striving in her dreams to still guide him.

While the Doctor and the Gentlewoman are still discussing these strange actions, Lady Macbeth passes before them, carrying a lighted taper. "Behold her now, with wasted form, with wan and haggard countenance, her starry eyes glazed with the ever-burning fever of remorse, and on their lids the shadows of death. Her ever-restless spirit wanders in troubled dreams about her dismal apartment."*

She places the burning candle upon a table, and its yellow flame only helps to accentuate the emotions that distort her face. She commences the motions of washing her hands. Whether walking or sleeping the smell of innocent blood is haunting her. She speaks aloud, looking at her hands which she cannot cleanse:

* Mrs. Siddons Variorum Ed. 11 Page 475

"Yet here's a spot--"

(Act V Sc. i l. 29)

It is a horrible spot--glaring witness of her unholy ambition. She is silent for a few moments and then, as her efforts to remove the spot rise to agony, cries fiercely:

"Out, dammed spot! out, I say!"

(Act V Sc. i l. 32)

Her wandering thoughts revert to her husband, and she imagines she is talking to him:

"One, two; why, then't is time to do 't."

(Act V. Sc. l. l. 32-33)

The smell of blood comes back to her. She is down in hell--hell, the shadow of a soul on fire:

"Hell is murky!"

(Act V. Sc. i l. 33)

"Can these words, "Hell is murky!" mean Lady Macbeth dreads future punishment? Earlier she had thought, as did her husband, that she could "jump the life to come," but now as we see, she has been unable to escape thoughts of the inevitable punishment waiting her."*

Once more her fever-racked mind goes back to Macbeth. The thought of him spurs her on in the need of encouraging him:

"Fie, my lord, fie!

A soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who

knows it, when none can call our power to account?"

* J.Q.Adams Macbeth Page 217

Again she displays that same arrogance of spirit she had shown when Macbeth was afraid to go through with the killing of Duncan. The fact that here this emerges from her subconscious mind shows what an ordeal that occasion at the performing of the deed must have been.

Arrogance and pride gradually fade from her--and a horror takes possession of her whole being. A cold shudder runs through her. Blood--blood, and still more blood! Will it never leave her alone? The haunting image of it makes her cry out, startled, like a child:

> "Yet who would have thought the old
> man to have had so much blood in him?"
>
> (Act V Sc. i ll. 35-37)

Macbeth himself is again in her mind. Her horror is not alone for Duncan's murder but for others that proceeded from the one to which she had driven him:

> "The Thane of Fife had a wife.
> Where is she now?"
>
> (Act V Sc. i. ll. 139-140)

Of all the crimes Macbeth had committed, Lady Macbeth knew before hand of only one--Duncan's murder. She knows now, as we see, of the rest.

Her attention turns again to her hands, and she wails piteously:

> "What, will these hands ne'er be clean?"
>
> (ct V. Sc. i l. 40)

She is silent. The Doctor and the Gentlewoman pity her to see how her "heart is sorely charged."

"Again Lady Macbeth reverts to the futile motion of washing her hands. After a while, she stops; she lifts them towards her face; she turns them for examination, and with a shudder of revulsion, she thrusts them away from her:"*

"Here's the smell of blood still!"

She is forever haunted by the smell and sight of blood. "Since blood was the dominating note of the tragedy, it is evidence of Shakespeare's remarkable insight that the dominating hallucination of the scene refers to blood."**

"All the perfumes in Arabia will not
sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!"

For a while Lady Macbeth is without speech. Suddenly, in her mind, she hears again the knocking at the gate. Frantically, but gallantly, she makes an effort of encouragement to her husband again:

"Wash your hands, put on your night-
gown, look not so pale!"

Lady Macbeth becomes suddenly rigid with fear. That knocking at the gate is still sounding in her ears.

"To bed," she whispers, "to bed, there's
knocking at the gate."

The memory of that night is branded on her soul. She pleads:

"Come, come, come, give me your hand."

* J.Q.Adams Macbeth Page 218

** Isador H. Coriat, M.D. The Hysteria of Lady Macbeth Page 56

Again Lady Macbeth is the leading light--the guide for her timid husband. Grasping an imaginary Macbeth by the hand, she picks up the lighted taper, and leads him, consoling him with:

"What's done cannot be undone: to bed,
to bed, to bed."

To her poor distorted mind the end and relief of all trouble and grief is the night and the safety of her bed.

The Doctor and the Gentlewoman are left alone, the only spectators of the awful scene. He is kindly and wise, and has all the pity and tolerance of the skilled physician. But, his skill is hopeless. He can only bid the gentlewoman:

"Look after her,
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
And still keep eyes upon her."

He is afraid that the Lady, in her despair, might commit suicide.

We do not see Lady Macbeth again in person, but we do hear of her later.

Before passing on, I am going to interrupt the train of thought for a moment. This sleep-walking scene is so very important and so impressive that I would like to give a few comments by a few of Lady Macbeth's critics.

Mr. H. Somerville, a member of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association thinks that throughout this entire scene Lady Macbeth is insane: "The likeliest, and only solution

of the problem is that Lady Macbeth had been becoming insane for some time, and that the madness from which she suffered had already set in, and was showing itself--as such early madness frequently does--in exalted ideas, unbalanced reasoning powers, excessive emotional states, a failure of sense of proportion in matters of conduct and in states such as that in which we have already seen and heard her, announcing her murderous intentions, making her valiant " preparation" and behaving, in general, like a Fury on the warpath."*

George F. Bradby, in his "Short Studies in Shakespeare," speaks of the reaction of the murder of Lady Macduff and her children on the mind of Lady Macbeth: "She has more of the woman in her than she was aware of, and that one murder kills her. It is not the dread of what may happen, but the dreadful realisation of what has happened that drives her out of her mind, the appalling discovery of what things really mean."**

Quite a different view is taken by Dr. Isador Coriat: "Lady Macbeth is not a criminal type or an ambitious woman, but the victim of a pathological mental dissociation arising upon an unstable, day-dreaming basis, and is due to the emotional shocks of her past experiences. Lady Macbeth is a typical case of hysteria; her ambition is merely a sublimation of a repressed sexual impulse, the desire for a child based upon the memory of a child long since dead. In fact, an analysis of the sleep-walking scene demonstrates that it is neither genuine sleep

* H. Somerville Madness in Shakesperian Tragedy Page 157
** Geo. F. Bradby Short Studies in Shakespeare Page 59

nor the prickings of a guilty conscience, but a clear case of pathological somnambulism, a genuine disintegration of the personality."*

Still another interpretation is offered by Lily B. Campbell, who arrived at the following conclusion only after an intense study of passion. She was convinced that Shakespeare in all his tragedies was primarily concerned with passion rather than with action.

In her sleep-walking "Lady Macbeth shows the images of memory which have been most deeply etched by fear....Anyone who does not believe that Lady Macbeth is the victim of fear should study those images of memory, for they reveal horror and fear. She does not dwell upon the havoc wrought by such deeds; she rather recalls those images associated with her extreme moments of terror and fear. It is not remorse...We see the pitiful results of the fear that conquered finally the reason that so long held it in abeyance."**

* * * * * * * *

The next we hear of Lady Macbeth is through her husband's conversation with the Doctor. We learn that her body as well as her mind is broken. Macbeth's inquiry for his wife is a piece of felt concern:

"How does your patient, doctor?"

(Act V Sc. iii l. 37)

There is a trace of genuine sympathy in this.

* Isador Coriat, M. D. The Hysteria of Lady Macbeth Page 28

** Lily B. Campbell Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes Page 233

Macbeth's love for his wife is expressed very dearly and plainly.

The Doctor knows that Lady Macbeth is beyond human or physical aid:

"Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest."

(Act V Sc. iii ll. 38-40)

In a moment of pity he has a deep feeling of compassion for her:

"Cure her of that.
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory of a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?"

Nothing is more strikingly characteristic in Macbeth's demeanor than the manner in which he received the news of Lady Macbeth's death. Nothing so thoroughly shows us that he had regarded her with genuine affection. He asks the physician to cure her. He loves her very much. Now he realizes how much that love means to him. He needs her and is almost distracted. Something <u>must</u> be done to aid her!

A cry is heard within the castle. It is the mournful lamenting of the Queen's women. Lady Macbeth is no more.

Only the shell of what once was a proud and awesome woman is left.

Macbeth abstractedly inquires: Wherefore was that cry?"

An attendant tells him: "The Queen, my lord, is dead."

Macbeth is stunned. The whole world seems to weigh upon him. He is so overcome with sorrow and grief that speech fails him. Finally he murmurs:

"She should have died hereafter.
There would have been a time for such
a word."
(Act V Sc. v ll. 17-18)

While the author leaves to our conjecture the cause of Lady Macbeth's demise, nevertheless, from the physician's order to remove all means of self-destruction and to watch her closely, he seems to insinuate that she died by her own hand. Such, at least, was the common rumor reported by Malcolm at the close of the drama:

"Who it is thought by self and violent
hands took off her life."
(Act V Sc. viii ll. 70-71)

"Her mind diseased from a continually disturbed and overwrought imagination, and her nervous system wrecked from insomnia, there is little doubt that the great commotion excited by the alarming beat of drums, the bugle-blasts to arms

resounding on every side, led her, in fear and despair of her own and her husband's cause, to seek by self-murder and escape from the horrors of impending perils. Awe-inspiring and fearful is the thought of her sinking to death in a mental agony of an overpowering despairing remorse, the unfortunate victim of her ruling passion."*

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* Simon A. Blackmore, S.J. A Great Soul in Conflict Page 294

V111 LADY MACBETH AS INTERPRETED BY ACTRESSES

Lady Macbeth has often been considered as a woman, who, selfishly ambitious for the throne, urges her husband on to durderous usurpation, a demoniacal incarnation of fiendishness and wickedness. The best exponent of this interpretation is Mrs. Siddons. Her impersonation of Lady Macbeth has long ruled the stage, and her estimate is worthy of special attention. She writes:

"Lady Macbeth had from childhood commanded all around her with a high hand; had uninterruptedly, perhaps, in that splendid station enjoyed all that wealth, all that nature had to bestow; she probable had no directors, no controllers, and in womanhood her fascinated lord had never once opposed her inclinations. In this astonishing creature, one sees a woman in whose bosom the passion of ambition had almost obliterated all the characteristics of human nature, in whose composition are associated all the subjugating powers of intellect, and all the charms and graces of personal beauty, a beauty, which, I believe, is generally allowed to be most captivating to the other sex--fair, feminine, nay, perhaps even fragile,

"Fair as the forms that move in fancy's loom,
Flost in light visions round the poet's head."

Such a combination only, respectable in energy and strength of mind and captivating in feminine loveliness, could have composed a charm of such potency as to fascinate the mind of a hero so dauntless, a character so amiable, so honorable as

Macbeth;--to seduce him to brave all the dangers of the present and all the terrors of the future world; and we are constrained even while we abhor his crimes, to pity the infatuated victim of such a thraldom."*

Mrs. Siddon's interpretation of Lady Macbeth was long supposed to be in harmony with Shakespeare's conception of her. Her opinion is based largely on the fact that through Malcolm he calls her a "fiend-like queen."

Mrs. Siddons had magnificient physical advantages, a majestic form, a powerful voice and a grand manner. With these gifts she combined a genius that could make her seem really possessed of the character of Lady Macbeth. It was Mrs. Siddons who first had the sense and courage to cast off the traditional hoop-skirts of the stage and to wear flowing draperies, with a very short waist, and to braid her hair close to her head.

So conscientious was Mrs. Siddons in portraying Lady Macbeth that she was constantly rehearsing the lines of the play in her mind. The following anecdotes show just how enrapted was Mrs. Siddons in her work:

"The fright that the player gave the innocent shopman when, unconsciously using her most tragic tones, she asked, regarding the cloth she was buying, "Will it wash?"--the sudden fierceness of her utterance surprised him off his feet. This was equalled by the astonishment she created in the mind of her dresser when preparing for Lady Macbeth. Without thinking of her assistant Mrs. Siddons, running over her part in her

* Thomas Campbell Life of Mrs. Siddons Page 152

mind, suddenly uttered aloud, with full force of intonation and with appropriate gesture, the words: "Here's the smell of blood still!" whereat the startled dresser cried, "I protest and vow, ma'am, you're hysterical. It's not blood, but rose-pink and water. I saw the property man mix it up with my own eyes."*

"Mrs. Pritchard, one of the greatest of Lady Macbeths, is said to have been totally ignorant of the play except as she had heard it acted under the glare of footlights, never having read a line beyond the text of her own part on the leaves of paper given her by the prompter. Dr. Samuel Johnson unjustly called Mrs. Pritchard a "vulgar idiot." Mrs. Pritchard was upright and pure in character, even if she was coarse and illiterate, and she possessed a soul-stirring power as Lady Macbeth, even if she did not understand the full significance of the play."**

"When Mrs. Pritchard played Lady Macbeth, the utterance of the words: "Give me the daggers!" is said to have sent such a thrill through the audience as no one else could produce, while in the sleep-walking scene the horror of her sigh was such as to make the young remember it with trembling. In this character she played her farewell the 24th of April, 1768, to Garrick's last Macbeth.

Mrs. Pritchard as Lady Macbeth wore long stays, and hooped petticoats, and dressed her powered hair high upon her head, costuming Lady Macbeth in the same way that Cleopatra

* C.E.L.Wingate Shakespeare's Heroines on the Stage Page 197

** Ibid Page 192

and other heroines were clothed."*

Ellen Terry attempted to revolutionize the remorseless, terrible woman of previous impersonations. She believed Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth was essentially feminine, and based one argument, to clinch that plea, upon the woman's fainting after the murder, when triumph is apparently at hand...Lady Macbeth was human even to being charming, modern, and womanly. Ellen Terry's Lady Macbeth was regarded as more of a curious novelty than an accurate impersonation.

With this new Lady Macbeth, in place of the raven locks of tradition, she displayed hair of a reddish tint with two long braids reaching to the ground, and she showed her to be a blithe, companionable woman.

But one native-born American has ever become famous on the English stage as Lady Macbeth. The world knows her name--Charlotte Cushman.

"In the role of Lady Macbeth she appeared almost in her own proper person, so far as appearance was concerned, being grand and inspiring, and imposing, with no vestige of what was fair, feminine, or fragile."**

One critic of Charlotte Cushman's, Vandenhoff, gives in his Note-Book, a graphic description of one scene: "She bullies Macbeth," he writes, "gets him into a corner of the stage, and, as I heard a man express it, with more force than elegance, she "pitches into him." In fact, as one sees her large, clenched hand and muscular arm threatening him, in

* C.E.L.Wingate Shakespeare's Heroines on the Stage Page 198
** Ibid. Page 194

alarming proximity, one feels that if other arguments fail with her husband, she will have recourse to blows.*

It has often been said that Mrs. Cushman supported her picturing of reckless carelessness in the Macbeths' actions by maintaining that both the Thane and his wife, through the more important scenes, were under the influence of wine.**

I had the pleasure, last December, of witnessing the performance of "Macbeth" in Boston, and of interviewing Miss Moore (Mrs. Walter Hampden) who impersonated Lady Macbeth.

Miss Moore's Lady Macbeth was fair, tall and slender, with long flaxen braids reaching to her knees. She was costumed in a long, flowing, black velvet gown. Around her waist she wore a heavy, white cord which extended to the floor.

Throughout the play Miss Moore was extremely graceful and even dainty. Her Lady Macbeth was surprisingly competent--cunning, gracious, fearful, sad, and pitiful, as the occasion demanded. "She brought fire to the part and a keen sense of unfaltering determination. The sleepwalking scene in her hands is not so emotionally moving as it is impressive. But it is still effective. As the play is now mounted, it is not so much the witches and their unholy power that govern Macbeth, as it is his lady. She is his keen-witted adviser."***

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*C.E.L.Wingate Shakespeare's Heroines on the Stage Page194
**Ibid Page 195
*** Boston Evening Transcript Dec. 21, 1934.

IX SUMMARY

The purpose of this thesis is to give a character delineation of Lady Macbeth--a character which has often been misunderstood by so many. To do this it has been necessary to bring in interpretations and criticisms by such authors as Mrs. Jameson, J. Q. Adams, Agnes M. Mackenzie, A. C. Bradley, Mrs. Siddons, G. F. Fletcher, and many others.

I have begun by devoting Chapter 1 to a little background material--to give a brief sketch of the time in which Lady Macbeth lived, and of the type of man Macbeth was. In the second chapter I have presented the sources from whence Shakespeare drew the plot for "Macbeth." Also, in this section I have given a brief account of what is known of the Lady Macbeth of history. The technique with which Shakespeare produced such an outstanding character from a mere mention of her in history I have introduced in Chapter 111.

The main body of this thesis is devoted in tracing Lady Macbeth's character and personality throughout the play. In the fourth chapter we see what incentive was given Lady Macbeth for the crime--how she so persistently urged her husband on to it--taunted and shamed him when he lacked the necessary courage--and how she finally aided in the actual deed by placing the dagger by the side of the chamberlains and smearing them with the blood of Duncan.

The fifth chapter pictures Lady Macbeth in all her artful cunningness when she swooned to save her husband from

betraying himself. This fainting has raised the question as to whether it was real or feigned. I have given the opinions of a few authors in answer to the question.

The highlight in Lady Macbeth's character I have shown in the sixth chapter when we see her at the Royal banquet. In this scene we see unshaking nerve and indomitable force of will joined together in the person of Queen Macbeth. In the seventh chapter I have followed Lady Macbeth through her sleep-walking scene, and finally to her untimely end--suicide.

The final chapter is concerned with the interpretations of Lady Macbeth's character by such actresses as Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Pritchard, Ellen Terry, Charlotte Cushman, and Miss Moore.

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